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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001255

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIA STANDS BEHIND ABKHAZ CLAIM OF MAY 4
SHOOTDOWN OF GEORGIAN UAVS

Classified By: DCM Daniel A. Russell for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) The Russian MFA released a statement on May 4 criticizing Georgia for sending two more UAVs over the security zone in Abkhazia and supporting Abkhazia for destroying them. The statement read that "according to information from Sukhumi, Abkhaz air defense forces on May 4 destroyed two Georgian UAVs, which were conducting unsanctioned flights over the security zone." The statement accused Georgia of ignoring Russia's multiple warnings about violating the 1994 Moscow Agreement, engaging in "adventurism," and "consciously" escalating the level of tension in the region by "forcing military preparations" close to the conflict zone. The statement closed by warning that "all responsibility for the consequences of such a course lay on the Georgian side."

¶2. (C) In our May 5 conversation, MFA Fourth CIS Deputy Director Aleksey Pavlovskiy stood by the MFA statement, despite recent Georgian official statements that the Abkhaz shootdown claim was "disinformation and a provocation from Russia." While declining to engage in the specifics of the alleged May 4 incident, including the implicit claim that the Abkhaz possessed anti-air defense systems in the conflict zone, Pavlovskiy said that Georgia has a history of first denying an incident and then subsequently "changing its story."

¶3. (C) Pavlovskiy took on board our message that Russia should restrain the Abkhaz leadership from making incendiary comments and conceded that statements from the Abkhaz ministry of defense that it was prepared to respond to Georgian aggression by "bringing military activities to the enemy territory" were "a little strong." However, he countered that Georgian statements were no less incendiary and was pleased that the U.S. continued to encourage Georgia to exercise restraint. Pavlovskiy commented that although it was clear the statements from both sides were meant to "scare the other," the consequences of such a policy course were unpredictable and destabilizing.

¶4. (C) Pavlovskiy stressed that the mediators should be focusing their attention on undertaking efforts to prevent a military conflict. He claimed that Russia's decision to increase its peacekeeping force in the region to "mitigate against Georgian destabilizing moves" was based on this fundamental objective. Pavlovskiy confirmed that approximately 2,500 Russian PKF are now in Abkhazia, but was not willing to provide more information on the timing of possible additional troop deployments.

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